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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: IOM TIP CONFERENCE UNDERSCORES NEED TO
STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION

SUMMARY

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11. (SBU) The International Organization for Migration (IOM) convened a regional workshop with funding from the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) July 22 to 23 focusing on strengthening regional cooperation for the recovery and reintegration of victims of human trafficking. Fifty participants from all of Central America, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Canada representing non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government, civil society, and international organizations attended the two-day session in Managua. The participants agreed that all sectors of society-- including the state, family, and community, as well as international organizations, needed to play a part to "close the circle" on human trafficking, and urged greater regional coordination to improve victims' assistance. Lack of funding and training for reintegration programs, inadequate shelters, security, and feedback channels for survivors, and community stigmatization of sexually trafficked victims were among the top challenges participants identified. The Nicaraguan Vice Minister of Government gave opening remarks highlighting Nicaragua's vulnerability to sexual exploitation of children and trafficking persons, and pledged his government's commitment to combat this crime. END SUMMARY

GON Expresses Concern

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12. (U) Emboffs attended the IOM's first regional conference on "Strengthening Regional Cooperation for the Reinsertion of Victims of Human Trafficking" held July 22 to 23 in Managua and had the opportunity to exchange perspectives with a variety of governmental and NGO representatives from Central America, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Canada, and convey the U.S. commitment to victims' assistance, protection, and reintegration. In his opening remarks, Nicaraguan Vice Minister of Government Carlos Najar highlighted the GON's restructuring of the National Coalition against Trafficking in Persons as evidence of its commitment to fighting the scourge of human trafficking. Noting that 46 percent of the female population in Nicaragua was under the age of 18, and that 10 percent of Nicaraguan children do not live with their parents, he observed that Nicaragua had reason to be concerned about the risk of human trafficking. Najar further acknowledged that many children born into poverty were

consequently often forced to work in the informal sectors at a subsistence level. The lack of opportunity combined with porous borders, the increase in regional trade, and the rapid spread of communications technology had created conditions conducive to the recruitment of children and adolescents into sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons. Najar emphasized that the GON had stepped up efforts to train and sensitize public officials on the issue, as well as made progress updating the geographic map on TIP routes, training neighborhood leaders, and launching an "historic" meeting last fall for national migration officials. He also explained that a GON top priority was to provide training on the implementation of the protocol for the repatriation of children and adolescents.

IOM Highlights Results of Chinandega Project

13. (SBU) Citing results of their programs in Nicaragua and other countries in the region, the IOM panelists emphasized the need to establish a holistic approach to assist trafficking victims in the areas of life skills training, building self-esteem, and increasing community education and public awareness. They underscored the importance of helping remove the cultural stigma of being trafficked and enable survivors to reconstruct their lives. Workshop panelists also voiced concern that many programs in place to assist trafficking survivors were not sustainable over the long term and that the problem of revictimization was pervasive in most countries represented. IOM representative Brenda De Trinidad shared results of the Nicaraguan-based Chinandega project (which receives PRM funding), including testimonies of female trafficking survivors. All had suffered serious health problems--physical and psychological--some were suicidal before their intervention, and several girls had become pregnant during their ordeal of exploitation. IOM reported that most victims receiving reintegration assistance in their programs were reluctant to prosecute the cases out of fear of retribution and lack of faith in the justice system. She asserted that while the main focus of victim assistance in the region was on children, more needed to be done to address attention for adults, pointing out that many victims were 14 or 15 when first trafficked and were now adults. De Trinidad urged the need to continue funding the Chinandega project, stressing the vulnerability of that area to human trafficking.

Participants Cite Common Challenges and Limitations

4, (U) The conference participants, nearly all female professionals with direct experience assisting trafficking victims, raised a number of concerns and limitations their countries share vis-a-vis reintegration and providing attention and services to victims. During the opening session, they discussed the need to arrive at a common language to more effectively and uniformly address the TIP problem and clarify the distinctions between human trafficking and illegal migration. A number noted that because of the shame and stigmatization of being sexually trafficked, victims often believe they are responsible for the exploitation and are more resistant to seeking and receiving help. Victims also worry about the consequences of being deported and abused by law enforcement authorities.

15. (U) Countries throughout the region face similar obstacles in providing victims' assistance, including the lack of qualified personnel to work with TIP survivors during the process of identification and reinsertion; the lack of shelters equipped to handle the specific needs of TIP victims; and problematic family circumstances, especially intrafamily violence-- a main obstacle to successful reintegration and long-term recovery. Other shared challenges included impunity for traffickers and sexual predators, the lack of protocols to cover the protection and reinsertion of victims or absence of compliance with existing ones, and inadequate security and protection for victims and their care providers. They also observed that neither government budgets nor international cooperation assistance

provided sufficient funding on behalf of victims, and complained that public policies did not adequately address the issue.

Recommendations to Improve Attention to TIP Victims

16. (U) On the second day of the workshop, each country delegation delivered a short presentation on their strengths, areas for improvement, and ideas on regional cooperation for reintegration of trafficking victims. The participants arrived at a number of common recommendations to improve the focus on reinsertion of TIP victims at both the national and regional levels. At the national level, they concurred that reinsertion programs needed to be backed by public policies that incorporate gender, human rights, and the protection of children's rights. They advised that national governments strengthen their operational capacity to develop projects specifically designed to assist victims by creating synergy between financial and human resources, better training and coordination of officials, and to take responsibility to ensure the long-term sustainability of these programs. They also urged that governments more seriously address the need to find alternatives to place returned victims in appropriate environments especially when the victims are stigmatized or rejected by their own families.

17. (U) As participants from virtually all countries represented lamented the lack of proper shelters, the need to develop more specialized shelters with the capacity to provide integral attention and adequate security emerged as a top priority. They also wanted governments to establish a mechanism to enable better monitoring and follow-up to reintegration cases and victim feedback channels, and urged greater training and sensitization of migration personnel to identify and provide assistance to victims. Better enforcement of existing protocols governing the repatriation of children and adolescents and greater efforts to prevent the revictimization and stigmatization were also deemed priorities at the national level. A Mexican participant lamented that child trafficking victims often turned into traffickers themselves, and stressed the need for civil society to play a role in helping to change this self-destructive mindset. One speaker from El Salvador advised that since child victims had lost part of their childhood as a result of being trafficking, their recovery and treatment needed to include recreational programs and creative programs in addition to education and life skills.

18. (U) In terms of strengthening a regional approach, the consensus was that countries needed to have better coordination to protect the physical integrity of victims during the repatriation process, develop a common database, improve information gathering and sharing--including information to provide attention to victims, and provide temporary shelters to protect survivors. Workshop participants suggested the establishment of a regional fund devoted to the recovery and reinsertion of TIP survivors, and recommended that the topic of human trafficking be addressed at the highest levels of government. They stressed that human trafficking be incorporated into the agendas of regional fora such as the Central American Security Commission, the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the First Ladies Forum, among others.

19. (SBU) Participants welcomed Post's recommendations to strengthen regional collaboration as well as ideas for domestic practices covering victims reintegration. They supported the creation of non-discriminatory shelters, increased long term sustainability and security of victims, ending corruption, efforts to expedite the prosecution of traffickers via regionally standardized penalties and law enforcement cooperation, and the creation of a regional manual on best practices. Given the positive response to this workshop, participants encouraged more regular workshops to better educate regional actors and further standardize reintegration techniques.

